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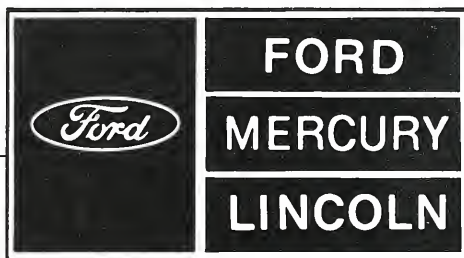
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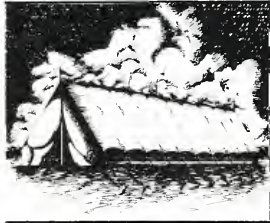
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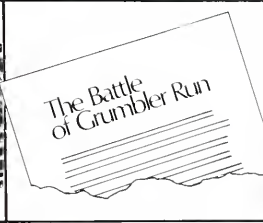
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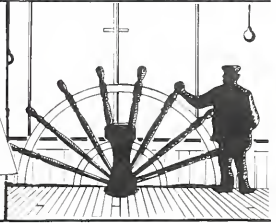
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A refreshing change in Ellen's new collection of short stories.

Cover Photo: A Ruby Throated hummingbird by William Powell. Bill teaches biology and photography at Delta State University. Picture was taken with Kodachrome 64 film.



JULY

And The Band Played On,
Smithsonian traveling exhibit,
History of Bands in America,
Carnegie Public Library, Clarksdale,
MS, 624-4461.

"Jewish Roots in Mississippi," an
exhibit of the Mississippi State
Historical Museum, Carnegie Public
Library, Clarksdale, MS, 624-4461.

Oil paintings by Gerald DeLoach,
Bolivar County Library, Cleveland,
MS.

Mississippi Museum of Art
Collection Exhibit, Atrium Gallery,
Jackson, MS.

July 6

Annual Grenada Lake Festival Flea
Market, Grenada Lake, MS.

July 7

Annual Grenada Lake Festival Ski
and Air Show, Grenada Lake, MS.

July 16-20

Annual Arts Week Brunch, Antique
Mall, Indianola, MS. Guest lectures
each day at 10 a.m. on Oriental
porcelain, textiles, and jewelry. For
more information call 887-2522.

July 21

Presentation of oil, watercolor, and
folk art paintings by Saul Haymond,
Sr. with reception. Cottonlandia
Museum, Greenwood, MS.

July 21 - September 1

90 prints by Matisse: The Legend of
Pasiphae, Mississippi Museum of
Art, East Gallery, Jackson, MS.

AUGUST

Watercolors by Edward Towler,
Bolivar County Library, Cleveland,
MS.

August 1-3

Photography Show, Greenville Mall,
Greenville, MS.

August 3

Crop Day, arts and crafts, tour of
cotton row and barbecue, Cotton
Row, Greenwood, MS, 453-4152.

August 11 - September 22

John Muse: Photographs, Graphic
Study Center, Mississippi Museum
of Art, Jackson, MS.

August 18

Mr. Ronnie Hamilton will present
his mixed medium paintings with a
reception following, Cottonlandia
Museum, Greenwood, MS.

SEPTEMBER

Paintings by Glennray Tutor,
Carnegie Public Library, Clarksdale,
MS, 624-4461.

Exhibit by Ann Jordan, Bolivar
County Library, Cleveland, MS.

September 2

Labor Day MDA Telethon,
Greenville Mall, Greenville, MS.

September 4-7

Talent Week, local artists,
Greenville Mall, Greenville, MS.

September 7

Indian Bayou Arts and Crafts
Festival, Gilmer Park, Indianola,
MS. For more information call
887-4454.

September 9-14

Presidential Display, Greenville
Mall, Greenville, MS.

September 15

Lucille Savelle will present her
mixed medium paintings with a
reception following, Cottonlandia
Museum, Greenwood, MS.

September 15 - November 10

Renoir-Guino Sculpture: An
Encounter of Four Hands, East
Gallery, Mississippi Museum of Art,
Jackson, MS.

September 21

Delta Blues Festival: day-long
concerts by blues artists performing
in the region where the distinctive
musical art form was born. Freedom
Village, Greenville, MS, 335-3523.

September 28

Third Annual Gateway to the Delta
Five Mile Run and One Mile Fun
Run, sponsored by the Yazoo
County Chamber of Commerce,
under the auspices of the MS Track
Club, Yazoo City, MS. For more
information call 746-1273.

OCTOBER

October 5

14th Annual Gateway to the Delta
Arts & Crafts Festival, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.,
exhibits and competition,
handmade items only. Cash awards
in arts and crafts competition,
sponsored by the Yazoo County
Chamber of Commerce, Yazoo City,
MS, 746-1273.

October 31

Mistletoe Marketplace, 9 a.m. -
5 p.m., Mississippi Trademart, the
Mississippi Fairgrounds, Jackson,
MS. Saturday shopping has been
added this year to meet increased
demand.

CONTINUING EVENTS

In Miniature handmade replicas of
old original homes, school, depot,
hotel, churches and other buildings
no longer standing on display at
City Library in Inverness, MS. Open
Monday through Friday, 265-5875.

Wetherbee House — 503

Washington Avenue, Greenville,
MS, 378-2538, 332-8148.
Greenville's oldest house in
National Trust for Historic
Preservation, changing art exhibits
in restored late 19th century
cottage. Open year round
Wednesday 1 p.m. - 3 p.m. and by
appointment. Admission.

Wister Gardens — a beautiful estate
open for your enjoyment year
round, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m., no entrance
fee. One mile north of Belzoni, MS.

Mississippi Museum of Art is open
Tuesday - Thursday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.,
Friday 10 a.m. - 8 p.m., Saturday
and Sunday 12 noon - 4 p.m. and is
closed Mondays. Docents conduct
Museum tours for adult and school
programs. For reservations call
960-1511 two weeks in advance of
tour date. Informal tours are
available for drop-in groups on a
first-come basis. See information
desk; no admission.

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Dr. Curt Lamar
Editor, **Delta Scene**
Box 3162
Campus

Dear Curt:

I always enjoy the **Delta Scene** magazine, and I particularly enjoyed the latest issue. It happens that I had read Shirley Abbott's **Womenfolks: Growing Up Down South** several weeks ago and thoroughly enjoyed it so I was delighted to see Rebecca Hood-Adams' review of the book. As a reviewer she was highly successful in revealing the essence of the book and whetting the appetites of those who have not read it. Such reviews are especially important, since they provide exposure to southern writers and make us aware of their writings. Since both the entire southern region and our state are "low on the totem pole" in so many areas we informed of books by writers from the south. Keep it up!

Sincerely,

Margaret Gunn
Cleveland, MS

Dear Dr. Lamar,

One of the highlights of my 1984 holidays was receiving my complimentary copies of **Delta Scene** on the day I got out of the hospital and just a few days before Christmas.

I considered it a special accomplishment to be included in your winter issue with such good writers and illustrators. Please let

Theresa Russell know that I and all my folks down there thought her illustrations just really made 'our' Christmas remembrance even more poignant.

Many thanks,

Van Henderson
Chattanooga, TN

To Whom It May Concern:

In your recent Spring issue of **Delta Scene** I especially enjoyed the pictorial essay "The River Road" by Virginia Rayner. Directly across from the Law House on Hwy. 1 at Foote, Mississippi, is the Lake Washington Sailing Club of which I am a member. We were hoping that your magazine might want to do an article on our club.

We believe sailing is not only a sport of great skill, but also a sport of great beauty and fun which is really taking off in the Delta. I am enclosing some brochures on our club and our big annual Spring Regatta which is coming up April 13-14. Our club would like to issue you an open invitation to come down and visit us anytime.

Once again, we would appreciate any interest your magazine might show in our club.

Sincerely,

Hal Holbrook
Hollandale, MS

To The Editor:

I want to tell you how much our Rosedale community has enjoyed the **Delta Scene** Winter issue that carried Leroy Morganti's article on Rosedale. Of course, I sent a copy to my son who finished at D.S.U. and who finished high school in Rosedale and played football with Leroy. Then my niece Jane Bush Person (Mrs. J.W., Jr.) from Port Gibson came to visit us and I shared a copy with her. I think she sent you in a subscription after enjoying the article so much. Toby Michaels Grocery and Lewis Drug Store just couldn't get enough copies. Please tell Leroy how much we enjoyed it. He is a smart young man — always was.

Hope all is well with you and your family. You have lots of friends and admirers in Rosedale.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Benjamin Alexander Bogy, Jr.
Rosedale, MS

Dear Dr. Lamar,

I am just delighted with the way my poem has been published. You have respected the integrity of the poem. The graphic design and the illustration is excellent. Please thank the people responsible for this, and tell them that I think their work has greatly magnified my own.

The overall quality of your magazine is impressive and I hope that perhaps one day you will again honor me by publishing another of my numerous poems.

Yours sincerely,

Nelle Harwell Richardson

delta memories

THE OLD TENT SHOWS

by Delma Furniss



It was Saturday — a hot dusty July afternoon in the rural Rena Lara community. The cotton crops were “laid by,” and most of the field work in the Mississippi Delta was over until harvest time. Excitement filled the air as the first of four large tandem trucks began unloading in the vacant lot next to Joe Few’s grocery. The first traveling tent show of the 1951 season had arrived.

Each year, from mid-July to the end of the cotton harvest season in early December, a steady procession of traveling tent shows circuited the rural Delta communities. Each entourage would pitch tent, stay two or three weeks (until all its films were shown), pull stakes, and move on to the next community to repeat the cycle. The lot would not be vacant but a few days, however, before another show group with different films would move in and set up tent. The cycle would be repeated several times annually between July and December.

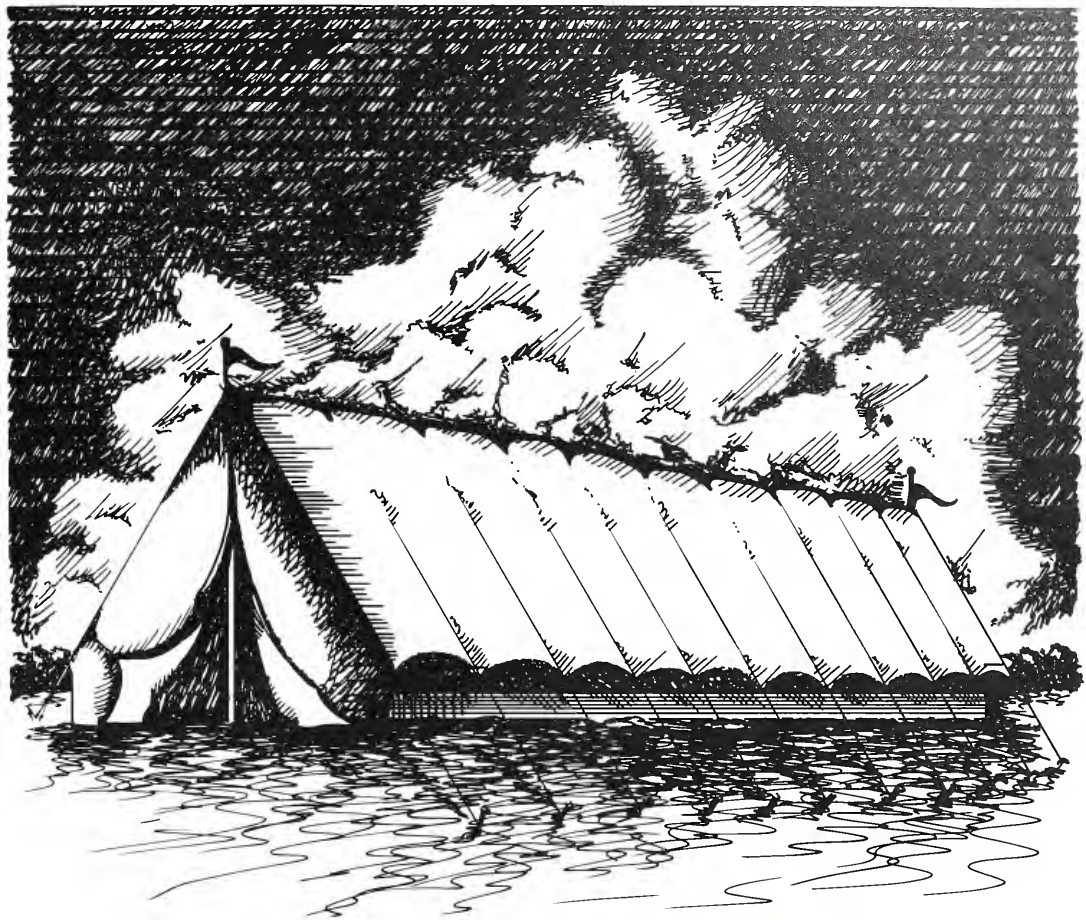
The show on that particular Saturday consisted of four old beat-up trucks loaded with tent canvas, poles, seat boards, and other show paraphernalia. A shiny new automobile towed a small neat

housetrailer which served as living quarters for the show owner and his wife. Two old dilapidated pickup trucks pulled two older shabby trailers in which the show’s four employees lived.

As the unloading began, the show owner enlisted the aid of some of the local youth, and in a short time the “big top” rose from the ground. Loudspeakers outside the tent blared music, loudly, and added to the carnival-like atmosphere as everyone scurried from place to place putting things in order for

opening night.

A platform was hastily erected near the front entrance of the large tent, and a free side-show was provided for the enjoyment of the spectators who had gathered. The side-show was a means of advertising the main feature which was to come later. The free show began with a magician performing sleight of hand tricks. It was concluded about thirty minutes later with a Negro minstrel named “Bones” doing a song-tap-dance routine.



The late afternoon hours offered little relief from the sultry weather until finally the hot July sun dipped behind the western trees. The uncomfortable heat slowly gave way to a cool refreshing night breeze. The hour was at hand — it was showtime!

The mingled scents of popcorn popping and hotdogs roasting filled the night air with an almost unbelievably delightful aroma. One could hardly resist succumbing to the enticing cries of the refreshment vendors as they peddled their wares. And the hotdogs and popcorn tasted even better than they smelled!

Fifteen cents was the price of admission. As one walked into the

big top, one faced a large white screen at the opposite end of the tent. Many rows of wooden benches lined both sides of the center aisle. The drab gray benches were backless and cushionless. But the excitement of the night seemingly made the uncomfortableness of the benches go unnoticed.

The lights were dim inside the tent, and the music was more soothing and relaxing. A constant hum of gleeful chatter echoed from the smaller children on the front rows. The prize-box vendor steadily paced the center aisle hawking his "prizes." A prize-box sold for ten cents. It consisted of several small pieces of candy in a box with a prize at the bottom. Most of the prizes

were very inexpensive and quite insignificant. But occasionally one of some value would be included to boost the sales of the boxes.

Suddenly, the music stopped and the lights flashed off. The show was about to begin. There was a rustle and then a mad scramble at several places along the bottom edge of the tent. Several "unfortunates" who did not have show fare had just made their "not so grand" entrance underneath the side of the tent.

All the tent shows on the circuit followed the same pattern. One could always count on seeing a good clean cowboy movie. Such stars as Bob Steele, Johnny Mack

Continued on page 22

Chili in Batesville

by William Hunt

A shooting star blazed across the sky and we started talking again.

"Let's play animal vegetable mineral," my sister said. Only a half hour earlier she had beaten me soundly at the game. It had been dusk then and you could still see something that could help you think of stuff to name.

"We just played that," I said, not wishing to be trounced so soon after my earlier defeat.

"Would you rather play cards?"

"No, I don't want to play cards. Besides, it's too dark."

"That's not the point. You have your choice: cards or animal vegetable mineral."

"Oh, all right. Animal vegetable mineral then," I said. I was lying in the back of the station wagon beneath the window that could be drawn up and down by a motor. It didn't have a hand crank like the Rambler station wagon we had owned before. Across the window another shooting star blazed.

"I've got one!" I said.

"Animal vegetable or mineral?" my sister asked. She was on the second seat playing solitaire with the deck of fluorescent cards she had gotten with cereal boxtops.

"Mineral," I said, thinking surely I had her stumped this time.

Without looking up from her cards she said, "A shooting star."

"That's not fair!"

"It's my turn now," she said.

"You cheated!!!"

"I did not cheat. Now ask me..."

After twenty miles or so I finally guessed that she was thinking about the blossom on a Japanese Magnolia. She had played two or

three hands of solitaire while I was asking all the questions and I felt sure either her mind had drifted off of what she was thinking of or she had deliberately lied.

"I'm never ever gonna play with you again. Not animal vegetable mineral or anything else," I said. Just about then we bumped over a railroad track.

"Chili time," my father said, "We're almost to Batesville."

"Oh boy!" I exclaimed as I leaned over the back seat where my sister was still playing cards. I could smell the whole bowl of chili as if it were sitting right in front of me, "I'll keep a lookout for the diner, Dad." We passed the Batesville Drive Inn so I knew it wouldn't be much farther. The screen was always bigger than anything in my entire imagination, bigger than the moon, bigger than the sun, bigger than the Milky Way. It wasn't till I was much older that I realized that even as big as that screen was, nobody ever watched it very much. People passing by on the highway probably saw more of the screen and paid more attention to it than just about anybody that paid to get in.

"I spy the Amoco sign," I said a little later when we were a half mile or so from the intersection where the diner was.

"What are you going to get, Jim Dan?" my mother asked.

"Chili," I said. "Do you even have to ask?"

"Never can tell," my mother said, "Someday you might just up and surprise us. Get a hamburger or something."

"I don't think so." The smell of chili was getting stronger.

My sister methodically was putting all the fluorescent cards

back together and tightening a rubber band around the deck.

"What are you going to have?" my father asked my sister.

"I'm not sure. I'll have to take a look at the menu. Unlike **some** people, I like a little variety every now and then." My sister was putting the cards in the King Edward cigar box that she carried with her everywhere she went. To me the box contained all the instruments of torture known to the western world: paper and pencil for hangman, crossword puzzles cut out of the Weekly Reader, cards, jacks, and checkers. When we were at home, I could usually find some way to avoid The Box. I'd play baseball or basketball or any outdoor sport and I wouldn't have to be subjected to torture. Even mowing the lawn was preferable to The Box. Rainy days were the worst though. There wasn't any way to escape.

My father turned into the gravel lot of the Amoco station and parked in his favorite spot between the bathrooms and the nab vending machines. "Everybody out of the bus," he said. Before my sister got out of the car, she finished with the cigar box and placed it neatly on the back seat. Then she followed my parents into the diner. When my father got to the door of the diner, he noticed that I wasn't with them, that I was still in the station wagon. Doing what he wasn't quite sure. He yelled something and waved at me. All the windows were rolled up so I wasn't able to hear what he said and this made it all that much easier for me to pretend I hadn't even noticed he was calling me. He came back to the car and put the key in the tailgate and the window rolled down above me like the hatch in a

James Bond movie. "Boy, you're gonna miss out on the chili." "I'll be on in a minute, Daddy," I said, sticking my head out the hatch. "What makes stars shoot?"

He leaned up against the car on one arm and looked at the sky. "They're not really stars, see. What they are is rocks falling out of heaven." He went on into a more detailed explanation and then said, "They'll still be there when we get through eating. The shower's supposed to last all night."

"Let me see just one more and then I'll be in," I said.

He turned the key again and the glass slid up, closing the hatch. It was quiet in the car and I lay there a minute or so more, waiting for Jesus or St. Peter to chunk another rock out of heaven like they were skipping stones on Sardis Lake. But they never did.

bowl. I crumbled several packages of crackers over the bowl, first crumbling the crackers then opening the clear package and letting the crumbs fall over the bowl like fragile flakes. I stirred up the chili till all the crackers disappeared then I started to crumble up another package.

Everybody else had gotten their food too. My sister had ordered a cheeseburger with french fries, mustard on the fries, just like she always did. She was as chained to monotony as I was, she just didn't like to admit it, that's all.

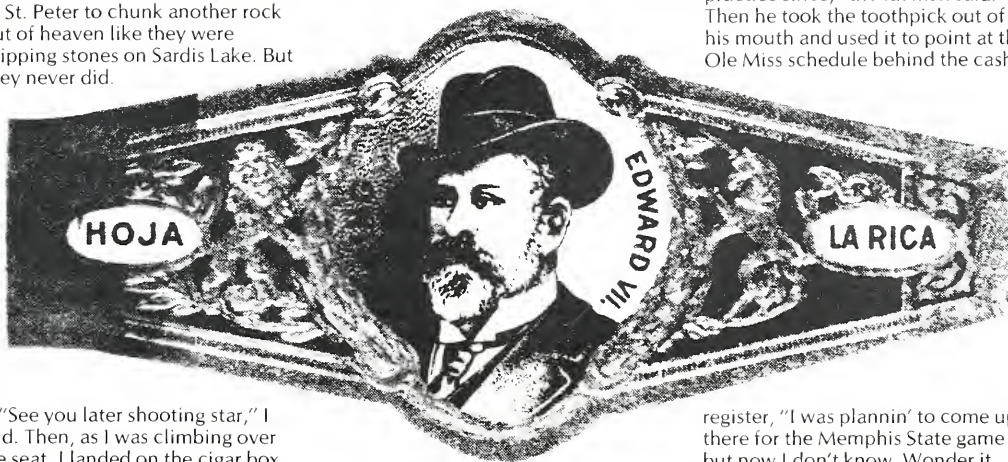
By the time we had all finished, I had used up six packets of crackers and had managed to avoid an

a man walking on the moon.

I was staring into the chili and crackers, mostly crackers now. My mother looked at me and said, "It'll probably all be over when we get back. Troops will be gone and everything."

When my sister finally finished off the last bit of her cheeseburger, we all got up from the table. My father paid the check to the fat man who had been constantly running a toothpick about his teeth.

"That nigger's gonna mess up the football season for sure. Already the National Guard's been camped out on the practice field for two weeks, and from the way I hear it Vaught ain't been able to hold a full practice since," the fat man said. Then he took the toothpick out of his mouth and used it to point at the Ole Miss schedule behind the cash



"See you later shooting star," I said. Then, as I was climbing over the seat, I landed on the cigar box and made a knee sized dent in the face of King Edward.

"I've had it now," I whispered, even though there wasn't anyone around who would have overheard. Then out of nowhere like one of those shooting stars came a gust of courage. I took the cigar box between my hands and marched to the rear of the station wagon with it. I knelt down and slid the box behind the tire and gave a regal salute to the good King Edward.

"You're chili's gettin' chilly," my father said. I thought for a minute that he had seen me stoop behind the car, but he waited at the door of the diner for me to run in and didn't give any indication that he knew something was up.

My chili was waiting for me, still hot with steam rising out of the

indoors game of "I Spy." This was accomplishment enough because my parents couldn't be called upon to help me distract my sister's attention away from the game. They were too busy talking about James Meredith and Ole Miss and tear gas.

"They fired shots into the Lyceum," my father had said, "Who knows what they'll do next."

"There's no tellin'. Maybe they'll shoot students and blow up cars," my mother said, frantically.

"They blew up Alex's mommy and daddy's car," my sister said with an air of worldly sophistication, "It was burning on the Cronkite news, remember?"

I could remember, and still can — a '58 Dodge Sedan bursting into flames on national TV, as unreal as

register, "I was plannin' to come up there for the Memphis State game but now I don't know. Wonder it they'll even have it."

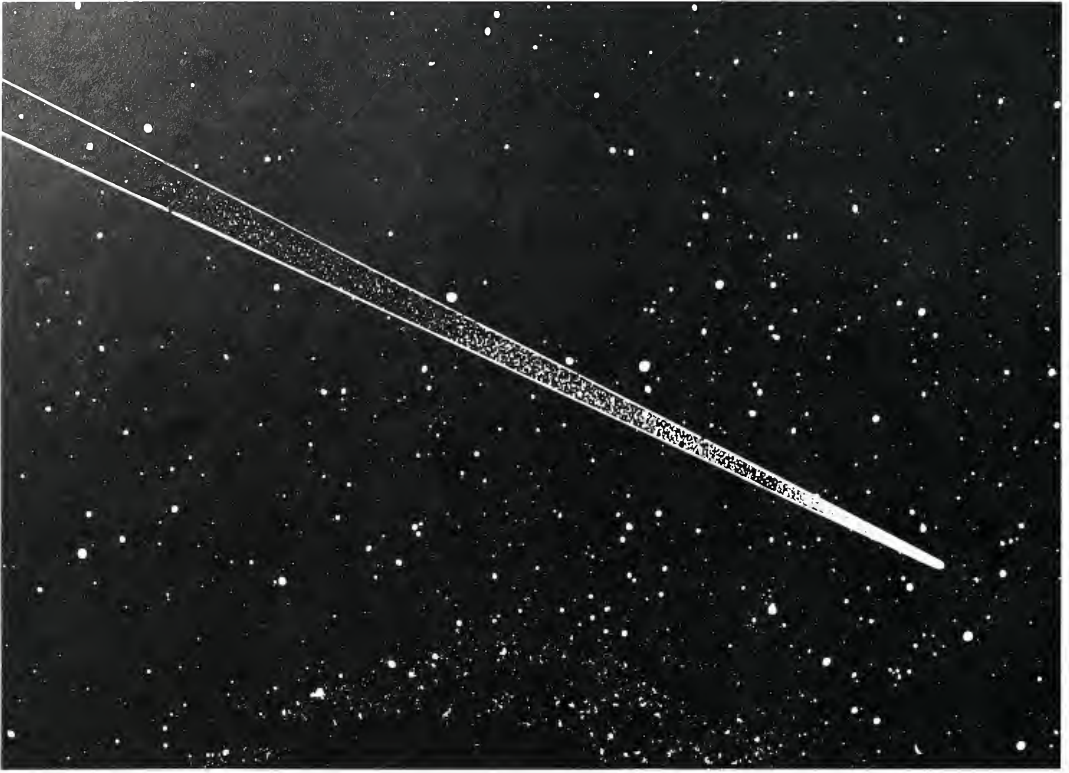
"Vaught says they'll play no matter what," my father said, handing the money and the ticket to the fat man.

The fat man picked up the ticket and read it as if he were reading about a murder case in the newspaper, "Chili again, huh?" He bent over to look me straight in the eye. "Instead of callin' you Jimmy Dan we're gonna have to start callin' you Chili Dan." Then he let out a big laugh that stopped when he choked on his cigar smoke.

My father took the change from the coughing fat man and ushered us all out the door.

"I'll race you to the car," my sister said.

"Okay."



We were off and half way to the car when my father yelled out, "Potty Time." I stopped dead in my tracks but my sister kept running till she touched the station wagon.

"Beat you!"
"No you didn't, Daddy said Potty Time."

"So. That didn't mean the race was over with or called off or anything."

It seemed like everywhere we went, every trip we took, Dad would somewhere along it yell Potty Time. He kept doing it until I was out of college. By the time he stopped absolutely altogether, I was twenty three. At that age he figured I was old enough to know when I did and didn't need to go to the bathroom. I had a few years of peace till I was in my late twenties and then everytime I saw him he would ask me if I was having trouble with hemorrhoids.

On the way to the restroom my sister was gloating about her victory

in the race. "Tomorrow at Nanny's I'll race you across the chicken yard and then we'll see who's the fastest," I said just before I entered the men's room.

When I came out of the bathroom, everybody else was in the car and my Dad had cranked it up. I jumped in on the back seat and waited. "I'll beat you tomorrow in the chicken yard too," my sister said.

My father shifted into reverse and an instant later there was a loud pop from King Edward.

"What was that?" my father asked.

"Goodbye, King Edward," I said. It was then that my sister noticed her box wasn't on the seat where she had left it, "You little brat. . ." Dad stopped the car and spanked the daylights out of me. It was what I deserved, I guess, but at least The Box was gone.

The death of King Edward and my spanking had silenced us all. Even

after we had crossed over the Old Lake Tallahatchie River bridge, some ten miles down the road from Batesville, nobody had said anything. I was busy searching for shooting stars and didn't notice when my sister must have bent over to get something from under the front seat.

"Cards or hangman?" she asked.
"What? Daddy backed over King Edward in Batesville," I squeaked.

"I carry a spare, always."
"It's too dark," I said absolutely.

Then she pulled a miniature flashlight from the box and flicked it on, "Cards or hangman. . ."

I turned my head away from the box and the cone of light and went searching for a shooting star.

William Hunt is a resident of Champaign, IL. He received his B.S. E.E. from the University of Alabama, and S.M. from MIT in electrical engineering. He is a doctoral student in electrical engineering at the University of Illinois.



defeat in summer



by Emily Humphrey

Even though you haven't met her, surely you must have seen her around? The doyenne of the supermarket? She would be graciously permitting the manager to answer her questions concerning the quality of today's lamb while she dropped dusty potatoes from a white-gloved thumb and forefinger into the brown paper bag held out by old Bradford, following with her grocery cart.

Living alone as she does behind all those big trees, back of those condescending columns, my sister Edie says Granny is a weirdo brought forward from the Dark Ages. A mummified flapper. Now, I wouldn't go so far as to agree with that, but this morning she really did bug me when I was down here in the basement working on these posters and placards. She 'phoned, ordering me to come and have lunch with her immediately — right that very minute.

Talk about imperious. Well, I

resented it, and decided I would bug her in return, so I just jogged right on down the hot, noon street, barefooted, in my paint-streaked bikini.

Would you believe she didn't even comment? Naturally, that bugged me still more, and I was seething as we entered the dining room.

We were seated at either end of that enormous old table (which she is leaving to Edie, thank God!) and from the other side of a cut glass bowl filled with roses her reflection streamed toward me.

Bradford was padding about, refilling the water goblets, and we had started on a blah dessert of apple float before I could bring myself to listen to her, even halfway.

Sometimes, when Granny begins to repeat one of her old tales, Edie will nudge me and start humming under her breath, "Ten thousand times ten thousand. . ."

"Did you say something, Edie?"
"No, Granny, I was just humming a hymn."

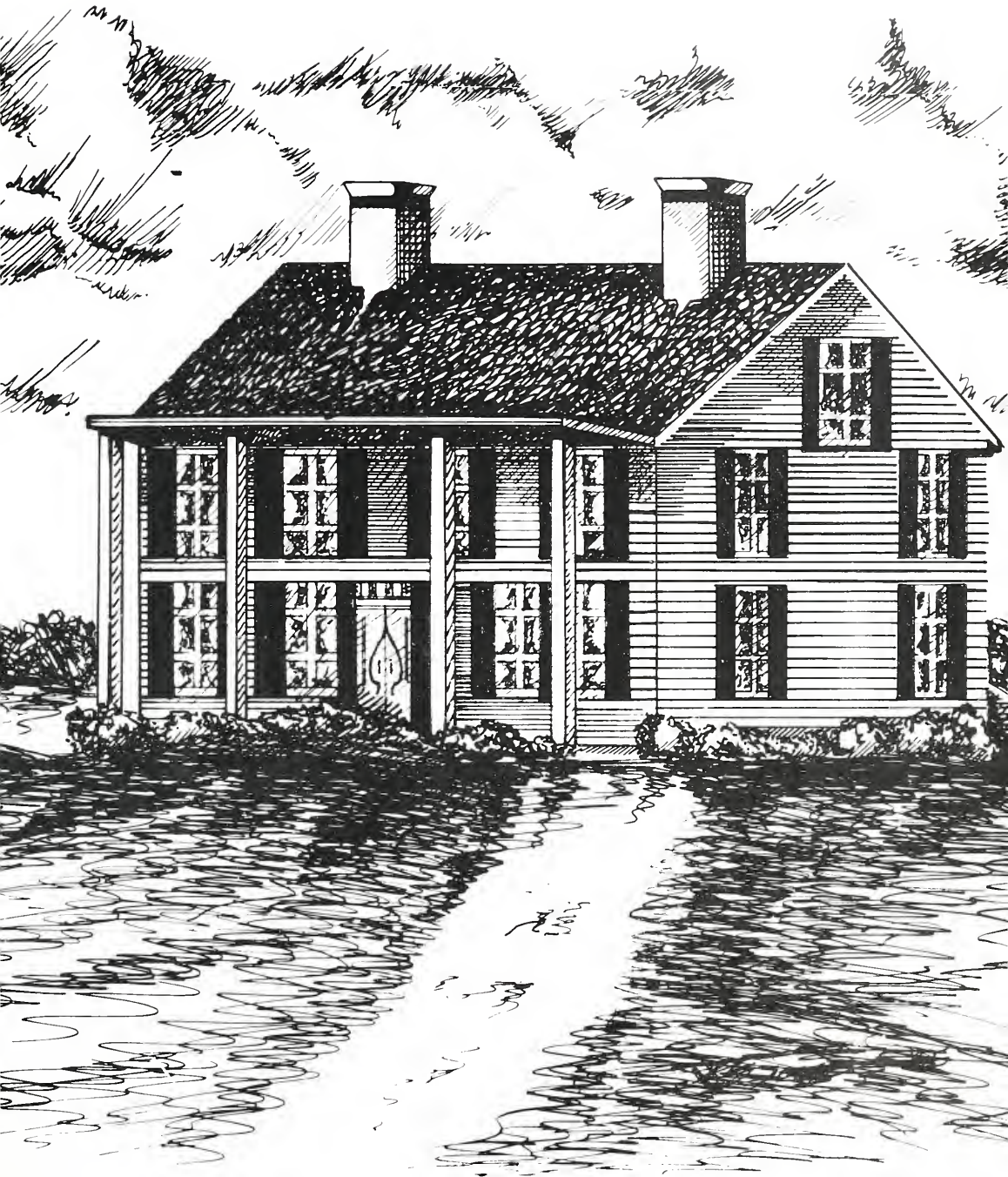
"That's nice, Dear. Now, as I was saying. . ."

But today Granny was talking to herself as much as to me — going on and on — and as nearly as I can remember it, when I did catch up with her, she was saying:

"'. . . And that's how it was, and I'm awfully sorry, I confessed, miserable with having failed the one I loved. I was tired after a hard cry and I was hungry. I did not want to talk about it any more.

"My grandmother did not reply. After several minutes of thought, she rose and took a brass key from the basket at the end of the marble mantel. She crossed over the cool, sweet-grass matting, fresh-laid on her bedroom floor for the summer, and unlocked the towering, mahogany armoire. I knew then she

Continued on page 24



A Memor

by Jo

The very name "Natchez" conjures up images of ante-bellum mansions, gracious living, wealth, romance and intrigue. However, much of the romance, intrigue and wealth of that era was achieved by the hardy pioneers who built the river boats and braved the daily perils of life on the river. One such was Captain Thomas P. Leathers of New Orleans who built and manned the steamboats of that name. There were seven of them and his son built the eighth.

Tom Leathers was "Cock of the Walk" on the Mississippi River. He was born in 1816 in Kentucky. He yearned for life on the river from the time he was a boy. When he was twenty years old he was working on first one boat and then another, riding between New Orleans and Natchez. He very early surmised that he would have to be a sharp businessman if he wanted to own his own boat. He began saving his money and learning to know the river. He was six feet four in his bare feet and weighed 270 pounds. After he built his boats and became a Captain he always dressed in white with a white hat, or in an expensive black suit with black hat. He carried a cigar almost as if it was a baton and his eyes could change from smiling agreement to raging command. He ranged between generosity and Jovian fury. River people either admired him extravagantly or they wouldn't set foot on his boats. He had the reputation of being the best "cusser" on the Mississippi. On one occasion he was heard to ask, "What's the use of being a steamboat captain if you can't tell people to go to hell?"

With all of his loud, bombastic nature, there are many tales of his



able Man



great generosity. He was known as a soft touch and had great compassion for those in trouble. He was always ready to help a widow in difficulty, a sick child or an injured man and would drop everything to assist one as need arose. On one occasion a woman approached him on the Natchez landing at sailing time. Her husband was very ill in Ohio and she had only a couple of dollars. The Captain bowed to her, treating her with the utmost courtesy, removed a male passenger from his room to make space for her. When the boat arrived he paid her way from Cincinnati to the inland point. On the return trip he picked her up with her sick husband and saw that they arrived safely home.

By the year 1840 Captain Leathers was building his first boat called "Natchez." With his first wife he was also beginning his family. She died, and he later went to the Natchez country for a second bride, one of the high-born Claibornes, the same family that gave Mississippi its early territorial governor. She was a gentle and tactful lady, while he presided over his household in the same grand manner that he used on his boats. He wanted everyone home at a certain time and on the dot. The children were expected to eat every item of food on their plate, or tell him why. He grew miffed if guests on his boats did not show proper delight with his delicacies. The cuisine at home had to match that of his vessels. Every day that strawberries were in season they were placed on the table.

Steamboat "Natchez" on the Mississippi River, picture by C. Cummings of Belzoni, MS.

Before the butler passed them, the Captain always went through the rite of squeezing a lemon over the bowls, remarking, "Brings out the flavor, you know." One guest did not care for lemon, so he did not eat the dessert. The Captain began to roar his displeasure. His serene little wife knew exactly what to do on these occasions. With two words, "Now Tom," he was silenced immediately. It was said of him that in five minutes he could shrivel any man without repeating a single oath, but his dear wife had only to say these two little words and he became the courteous, courtly, southern gentleman.

When Captain Leathers built the first of the great "Natchez" steamboats in 1840 he was a proud man. This first "Natchez" was built "at the mouth of the Crayfish Bayou." She ran until 1848 as a fast packet in the New Orleans to Vicksburg trade. The great need for transportation on the river caused his business to grow so fast that this first boat was unable to handle the trade. Captain Leathers sold it and built a larger, faster boat. More attention was given to passenger comfort on this second "Natchez." This one also was soon outgrown as the public clamored for bigger, speedier and more elegant boats.

These steamboats were called "Floating Palaces" and truly lived up to this name. Old correspondence and documents tell us that many young couples were married by the captain on one of these boats and spent their honeymoon aboard while traveling to their new home to pioneer in the wilderness and swamp. What a rude awakening it must have been for many young brides to start their married life in such a romantic setting and later to inhabit a log cabin in a mosquito-infested swamp, surrounded by wild animals, Indians, and danger of disease. The atmosphere of the present "Delta Queen" is reminiscent of the luxury of these early "Floating Palaces."

The third steamboat "Natchez" was one of these, but brought sadness amidst glory. While docked

at New Orleans in February 1845, she went up in flames along with twelve other boats. Captain Leathers was aboard and barely got himself and his young wife out in time. One of his brothers, James Leathers, perished in the fire.

Undaunted by this tragedy, the Captain built the fourth "Natchez," and by early 1855 she was carrying the mail between New Orleans and Vicksburg every Saturday.

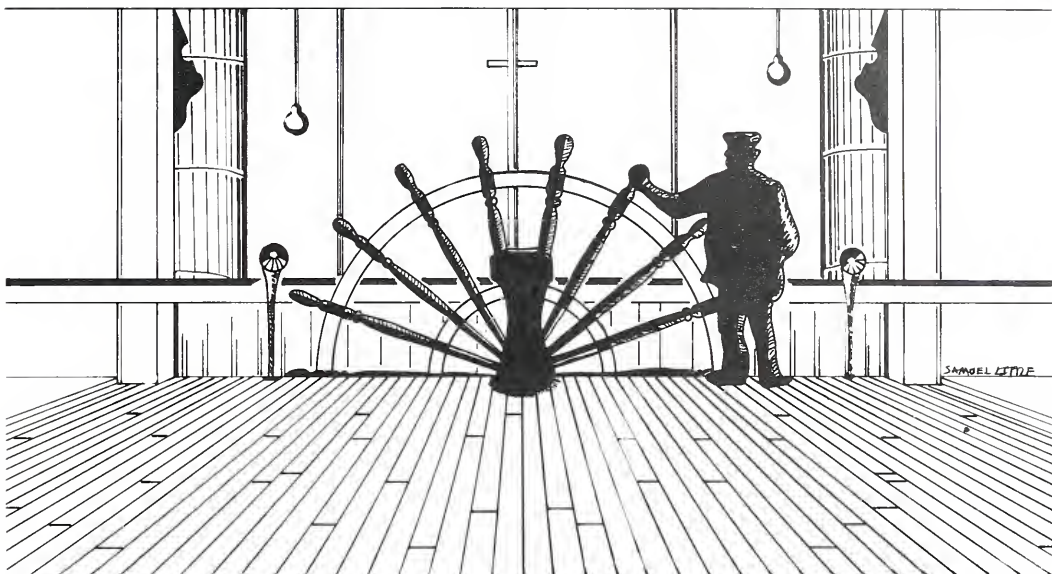
"What's the use of being a steamboat captain if you can't tell people to go to hell?"

The fifth "Natchez" was built in 1859. It was to be a pleasure boat but its destiny became one of history instead. Captain Leathers set out to make this one the finest thing afloat or ashore and it was a thing of beauty. All of his vessels pictured Indian life, but this one went to unusual lengths. In rich reds, yellows and blues the cabin skylights showed a series of panoramas. "The War Dance," "Smoking the Peace Pipe," "The Hunter Returns," and many more. There was much gilt work. The wall panels and draperies were all designed to look Indian. For comfort and elegance this boat was unsurpassed and was acknowledged to be the last word in luxury. Specially woven carpets were ordered from Belgium. Bright chandeliers made by skilled craftsmen, plus a glass dome, ornamented the elaborate interior. The Captain now had his finest steamboat. He showed her off, but alas! not for long. This boat was destined to be, not a Floating Palace, but a gun boat and was used as a "Ram" in the War between the States. She arrived at New Orleans shortly before the War and when hostilities broke out she was sent up the Yazoo River to escape Federal seizure. In 1862, with 2,000 bales of cotton stacked around her as protection, she was used as a ram and was burned.

A resident living on the bank of the Yazoo River at a small community just south of Belzoni called "Stringtown," so named because there was nothing but a little string of houses on that bank of the river, lived long enough to give an eye-witness account of what happened on that fateful day when the fifth "Natchez" went down. It was noted that: "The steamboat Natchez sank in 1862 near Stringtown. It was loaded with cotton and came from Greenwood going to Vicksburg to be used as breastworks. Seeing that a Yankee boat had come out of Tchula Lake and approached on their rear, and a Federal gunboat from the direction of Goat Hill Plantation was facing them from the other way, capture was inevitable. The crew cut open the cotton bales, poured kerosene over them, set the cotton on fire, and threw it overboard to keep the Yankees from confiscating it. They then set fire to the boat. The once beautiful Natchez sank slowly into the muddy depths of the Yazoo River in the Delta." The word "Yazoo," a Choctaw word meaning "Death," sealed the doom of the steamboat "Natchez" — another tragic victim of the Civil War.

Captain Tom Leathers was a remarkable man and in 1869 he began building another "Natchez," the sixth of that name. This one lived to become the most renowned and best known of all the river boats. The sixth "Natchez" was the one which lost the speed title in that tale of the great river race between the "Natchez" and the "Robert E. Lee." However, she lived ten long, useful and profitable years, and ended up in retirement as a wharf-boat at Vicksburg. The story of the race between the "Natchez" and the "Robert E. Lee" is legendary in the South. The "Natchez" lost the race but the Captain was never willing to concede to victory.

After this, the Captain carried on, enjoying a lion's life, drawing bows and cheers whenever he stepped ashore in his favorite town. There were more races to be won. He was always in a fight trying to cut his rival's time, dropping rates,



bankrupting his opposition. Part of it was sheer bravado, the rest horse-sense. The public wanted steamboat captains that way; it wanted fireworks and Tom Leathers could provide them. He liked to crowd other boats, using any trick to take advantage — the sudden dropping of a tub of lard into the boilers for an unexpected spurt of speed, or the crossing of another's path by a sharp maneuver at a river bend. He was known to fire his cannon across the bow of another boat for no reason except to irk competitors and put on a show for the gallery. There was little in the way of established rules of courtesy, safety or fair trade practice on the river at this time. He enjoyed delaying his departure deliberately to let another boat leave ahead of him. He would then catch up, pass it and hear the crowd roar its admiration. The trade went to the man who made the biggest splash and no holds barred.

River boat traffic was beginning to ebb in 1879 when Captain

Leathers put forth his greatest effort with the seventh "Natchez." She was a beautiful sight with her hand-painted transom lights depicting Indian Chiefs. Gorgeously equipped, she operated successfully at first, but was just too late for the big time. By 1897 the Captain laid her up for two years, after which she sank.

"...but it seemed that while Captain Leathers lived there was to be a 'Natchez' on the river."

During the war Mrs. Leathers decided that she wished to live in New Orleans. The great captain, ever devoted to Natchez and to Myrtle Terrace, his home there, said NO. He would never move. He was settled there for all time! And so the quiet Mrs. Leathers soon had him packing his things. He sold Myrtle

Terrace in favor of a more extensive establishment in the Creole City. However, the Captain returned to Natchez at every opportunity. He loved to swap yarns with old friends.

War's end brought a temporary upsurge for the steamboats. Tom Leathers stepped forward as before, inspecting the trade from beneath his shaggy brows. Somewhat older, he hardly grew more mellow. It was the Leathers of this day who drew the description, "The Eagle of the Tribe," with war paint in his words if not on his face, and a tomahawk in his logic.

When the seventh "Natchez" sank it was the end of Captain Leathers' boats named "Natchez," but it was not the last boat of that name to ply the river. The eighth "Natchez" was being built in 1891 by his son, Bowling Leathers, and his wife, Blanche. The old man had no interest, financial or otherwise, in this eighth boat. The railroad

Continued

whistles had already sounded taps for the great days of river trade, and the Admiral of the Mississippi was busy with another boat which he named the "P. T. Leathers." This was his last venture. There was not much about the eighth "Natchez" to remind oldtimers of her predecessors except her name, but it seemed that while Captain Leathers lived there was to be a "Natchez" on the river.

This sternwheeler was on the river on June 1896. On this fateful day the venerable old captain was crossing the street on St. Charles Avenue, one block from his fine home in New Orleans. It was night time. From out of the dark came a hit-and-run bicyclist. Captain Tom Leathers, a man who had lived through the turmoil and excitement of an era, the victor of duels, fisticuff encounters, fires and storms — a man who had endured all the perils of life on the river — ironically, was fatally injured by a BICYCLE. He lingered on until January 13 when he died.

An early pioneer to be remembered in Mississippi and the Delta, this man, his life, his character, and his steamboats left behind many fascinating stories of life on the river. Captain Tom Leathers was, indeed, a Memorable Man.

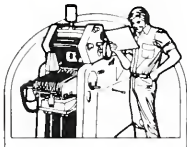
Jon Cerame is the author of "From Greasy Row to Cattish Capitol," a history of Belzoni. She is a feature writer for the Belzoni Banner and has owned an art studio and taught art for 10 years. She has studied with Marc Bellaire, Naomi Goode, of Dallas and has studied china painting with Nettie Pillet of California. Mrs. Cerame, who is now retired, has received numerous awards for her Indian Tribal designs carved in clay. Her other interests include history, archeology and Indian lore.



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Brown, Tim McCoy, Hoot Gibson, and Hop-A-Long Cassidy always won out over the bad guys. Each show would invariably end the same way. The "main player" would ride into the sunset, pause briefly, and wave a friendly farewell which somehow seemed to make everything in the world right once again.

Another integral part of the traveling tent show was the serial, or "continued piece," which was designed to bring one back night after night. Each night the serial would end in a suspenseful situation, and the viewers were enticed to return to see the next dramatic episode. One could hardly resist returning the following night to see if the hero was able to rescue the beautiful lady from the clutches of the monster, the giant, the madman, or whoever the evil villain might be in that particular serial.

There was always a note of sadness when a tent show pulled up stakes to leave at the end of its short tour. But one was always comforted to know that very shortly another

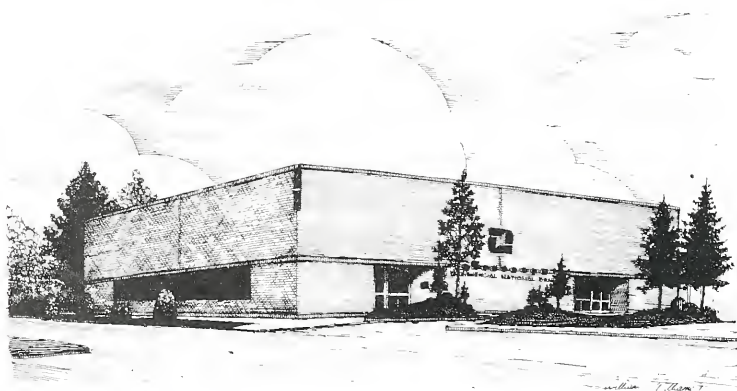
show would arrive and continue the ever familiar cycle.

Many years have passed since that July Saturday in 1951. The more widespread use of automobiles and the advent of television into the rural Delta forced the traveling tent shows to "raise the big top" less and less frequently. Finally, the shows disappeared altogether.

Many youngsters today laugh in disbelief when told of the old tent-show movies. But they cannot possibly know how much fun and enjoyment they have really missed. As the old traveling tent show faded into oblivion, a part of Mississippi Delta history went with it — gone forever, except to occasionally be relived in memory by such tales as this.

Delma Furniss received his B.A. degree from Delta State University with majors in political science, history, and English. Mr. Furniss is a native of Rena Lara, MS. He is currently enrolled in the graduate history program at the University of Mississippi and is serving as a member of the state legislature from Coahoma County.

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Delma Furniss
Rebecca Hood-Adams
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Art Design
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had shed all pretense, had acknowledged herself the perpetrator of the plot, and had allowed me to lapse honorably into the restful role of pawn. She had accepted responsibility for our rout, but she had not yet accepted defeat, and she now dressed for an immediate counterattack.

"Out of the armoire she lifted the large, black plush hat, wobbly with its overload of willow plumes. Through its stiff crown and the hair rat beneath her white pompadour she maneuvered two foot-long jet hat pins. About her shoulders she fluffed a matching feather boa; over one wrist, perfumed with Hudnut's Violet Sec, she hung a black leather handbag; and from a sandalwood box she selected a pair of white kid gloves.

"I will explain it to her. Help yourself to the fruit," she said; and gathering up her long skirts in one hand, she went out.

"I chose an orange. Working off the peel, munching a juicy section, I stared long at the disastrous grade of ninety on the history paper lying on my lap, and still longer at the needless minus-ten in the margin

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beside the first question. While Mattie had been sensibly content with a ninety-eight, I had thrown away a hundred; and instead of the delight I had secretly pictured on my grandmother's face, I had planted speechless disbelief.

"She had been widowed while still young, and had supported herself and her three children on her writings and on her salary as the first woman principal of the school. She had wrung that position through sheer ability from a skeptical board of trustees, and had relinquished it years later only in deference to her children's wishes. She never forgave her successor — first, for being a man, and second, for having fathered a child, Mattie, who was smarter than any of her grandchildren.

"When Mattie and I entered the eighth grade, it was as if I had been pulled — feet dragging — into an arena. The day before, my grandmother had confidentially whispered that through me she would humble that upstart of a principal. She would divert the

Continued to page 26



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U.D.C. history medal, awarded annually, from his daughter's thin, expectant bosom to mine. We both knew this would take some doing, for able, conscientious Mattie consistently and easily topped my all too casual efforts by a comfortable margin. But who was I to stand up to — to say 'No!' to a grandmother who long ago had been accepted as invincible?

"Thus began the weary nights of our joint assault upon my brain. The tedious memorizing, the monotonous drilling, the collateral reading began to bear fruit, and I was both happily surprised and wholly content to find myself all through the year running neck-and-neck with Mattie. Not so my grandmother. She found this deadlock increasingly irritating. She urged me again and again to break it — to forge ahead — take the lead. Her frustration was unbearable by mid-spring, for although I was letter-perfect in my preparation for the coming monthly test, I was obliged to report that Mattie, her mettle aroused, was fluttering her

hand aloft in class with alarming regularity.

"As a result, I was ordered to keep my head, and to tip the scales in my favor with correct punctuation and spelling, a pleasing choice of words, supplementary facts — anything, just so long as my method was honorable.

"The ten test questions which, one by one, filled the blackboard that memorable afternoon, were exactly those which had received special emphasis in class. Victory, therefore, would not hinge upon so simple a matter as supplying the stark facts, but upon the garlands of regional sentiment unifying them.

"Question one. This called for the name and a full description of the first significant land battle of the Civil War. How to wring the most from that Confederate victory upon which old soldiers and the U.D.C. dwelt so lovingly? Mattie, tongue in cheek and pencil flying, had already covered a page with her tidy script. However, I did not let this stampede me into an imperfect beginning. I took my time.

"Through the open windows mild spring breezes entered, bearing tantalizing fragrances from out-of-doors. An undecided butterfly made her jagged flight in and out again, and a bobwhite called from the locust grove. Thus beguiled, I thought for a moment upon the delicacy — upon the fastidious restraint — of lovely Spring.

"Surprised by this novel (and, I fancied, adult) turn of my reflections, I suddenly realized that here at hand was a dazzling opportunity to demonstrate my own delicacy and restraint. Did I dare — this once — borrow the Yankee name for this battle to score a sure and fine success? The idea instantly became irresistible, for it would certainly cause my paper to stand apart. My teacher was a timid spinster; she not only embodied but daily urged upon us those gloomy, depressing virtues attributed by Memorial Day speakers to Glorious Southern Womanhood alone, and a little ladylike editing of history might well delight her.



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"For were not certain words prohibited to my sisters and me by such as these? **Nasty**, for example. That fetched one a sharp look and a warning to watch one's tongue. **Stink** was shockingly more offensive; and for its use, even in fierce and righteous anger, punishment was swift and certain. But the name of that lordly creature that bellowed, that pawed the earth in rage, that daily led his bovine harem to and from the pasture — the name of him that dominated that secretive and forbidden world of the barnyard was never to be uttered under any circumstances whatsoever. It had, in fact, been lifted neatly, like something encapsulated, from our vocabularies by our elders who, through prim lips, substituted as an acceptable synonym the connotative title of **grumbler**.

"And so, on that balmy afternoon, on an ink-stained desk, feeling certain of victory and sorry for Mattie, I wrote a long and pious dissertation on the Battle of Grumbler Run.

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"My grandmother was gone a long time the afternoon I took my paper home. On sun-dappled steps at the end of the long, boxwood-bordered brick walk I waited for her; and as she approached through the dusk, and I saw that we were beaten, I ran to take her hand and hold it against my cheek.

"The woman is more than insensitive," she sighed. 'She cannot be a lady. I shall speak to your parents about boarding school.'

"And September, with its welcome noise and color, came around again, sealing off the hot and idle summer. A frieze of mules drew the creaking cotton wagons to the gin, and their clouds of dust copper-plated the roadside goldenrod. Laboring all day and far into the night, the grist mill stuttered and complained to the steeples of the town. The perfume of wood smoke, in layers of azure, hung in the air; and purple stalks of sugar cane were fashioned into wigwags in front of every grocery store. The frost-proof, glass-covered fern pit was readied for its contents,

then rippling like fountains of green over the heavy jardinieres. Down at the Corner Drug Store, softly glowing in a window display of sobering new text books and the same old Big Chief tablets, were novel boxes of rainbow colored chalk that instantly became **de rigueur** atop the most fashionable desks. There was the happy agony of choosing new hair ribbons for the mounds of dresses just sent in by the dressmaker; and once more the school bell rang from the hill. There, upon her turn at jump rope, Mattie's nimble little feet lifted to the swift rhythm of Hot Pepper, and the U.D.C. medal bounced up and down on her plaid gingham chest where it rightfully belonged.

"But by then, I had been taken out of that exciting and familiar world. In a stiff, new middy blouse I trailed the strange backs of my new classmates along the cool corridors of St. Catherine's School. Though soon to love it dearly, I was, at first, homesick and bewildered. In an early letter home, in which I told of my troubles, I blamed them not on myself, nor on my grandmother, nor

on my teacher; but with all the indignation I could muster I blamed them openly, defiantly, and squarely upon a nasty, stinking bull."

That was all. That was it.

When Granny had finished her story she pressed the pointed tip of a high-heeled pump against the buzzer, and Bradford came shuffling again through the swinging door. Just as I was finishing that archaic ritual of the finger bowl, he placed a silver salver beside my plate. On it, in a curled up nest of golden chain, glittered that big, heathenish diamond cross that had belonged to Granny's grandmother.

Rising, Granny came around the table toward me, and I watched in horror as she lifted the chain over my head and pinned that monstrous cross to a strap of my halter. Then she leaned down to kiss me on the forehead, and without another word, moved slowly out into the hall to mount the stairs and take her rest.

Now, I ask you: what on earth will I ever do with an albatross like that?

What was Granny demonstrating against? My grades?

Did she think she was lecturing me concerning — among other things at the University — the walls of the locker room, or the inside of the public telephone booth?

Oh, I felt the pull of her gift, all right. It lay heavy against my shoulder, all weighted down now as it is with other, less innocent four-letter words that will trouble me forever. Like **duty**. Or **pity**. Yes. And **fury**, too, for I couldn't get the thing off fast enough.

Then I just sat there, listening to old Bradford finish up. After a while, when the house was quiet, I got up and called home.

Edie answered. "Okay, okay!" she bitched, though all I'd asked was whether she would mind getting the car out and driving down to take me home.

Emily Humphrey, a native of Vaiden, MS, now makes her home in Jackson. She attended All Saints', Couchner College, and MUW and received a B.S. degree. She is retired from Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

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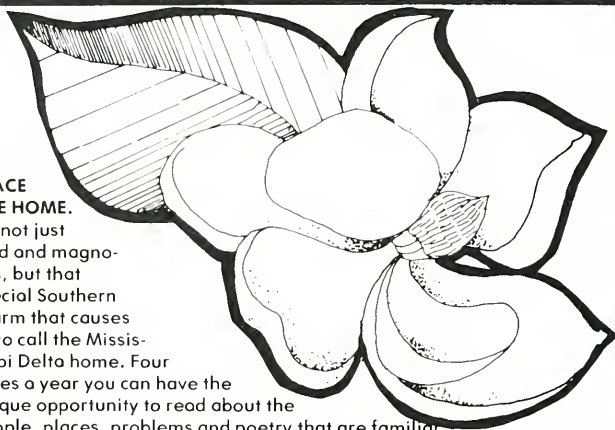
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Book Review

by Rebecca Hood-Adams

One of the intrinsic problems with the short story as a medium of creative expression pertains to reader involvement with characters. Just about the time the author gets you hooked on a particular character — poof! the story comes to a halt and that poor character for whom you were rooting, falls off the edge into the Land of Unrealized Potential. Maybe if you're lucky, the story will subsequently be woven into a novel by that same writer, but rarely do you pick up where you left the character in the short story. You have to settle for a slice of his life. And if the author is skillful in character development, you feel as cheated as Jacob who labored seven years to earn the hand of Rachel and found her plain sister Leah beneath the bridal veil instead. Never knowing "the rest of the story" is part of the price you pay for loving short stories.

However, you'll find a refreshing change in Ellen Gilchrist's new collection of short stories, **Victory Over Japan**. We last encountered Gilchrist in her novel **The Annunciation**, a strong first novel deeply rooted in the Delta. The stories in **Victory Over Japan** focus on three Southern women as they move away geographically from their roots, still toting the emotional baggage of their regional upbringing. Just when you finish one tale about Nora Jane Wittington, who has recently robbed a bar in New Orleans to finance an ill-fated rendezvous with her lover in California, and long for another peek at Nora Jane's life, Gilchrist indulges you. Turn the page and satisfy that itch for what happened next. There's not quite enough meat for these connected stories to lay claim to the dusty label "novella," but neither are you





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short-changed about the character's fate. You get a satisfying hunk of Nora Jane's life, not the anemic little slice which comprise the modern literary diet.

It is Gilchrist's great gift for characterization which makes this collection so pleasing. These are women about whom the reader really cares. Although one hears echoes of Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty throughout these stories, Ms. Gilchrist has her own unique voice — and it is outrageously funny, moving, tragic, and always appealing. These are modern Southern women with contemporary problems. Enchanted and enchanting, they cavort through life, in and out of bars, marriages and divorces, through the world of art and culture, drug busts, their lovers' arms, and even earthquakes in an attempt to find, if not happiness, at least some satisfaction.

Best of all, Gilchrist makes you laugh. Southern humor too often lapses into caricature — the Granny Clampett syndrome. But I was weak with laughter at the antics of Miss Crystal who takes off to Texas to wreak final revenge on her arrogant older brother. It's a road trip reminiscent of real life Southern crazies. I found it perfectly plausible that brother Phelan, the gone-broke Delta planter, was trying to re-coup his fortunes conning would-be hunters from the big city. He imports Russian boar on a barren acre of Texas flatland and strokes the egos of the wealthy who want a trophy at any price. Couldn't happen? I remember the year we all raised sunflowers as a potential cash crop.

Summer's too languid and sticky for epic reading. But Ellen Gilchrist's collection **Victory Over Japan** (Little, Brown and Company, \$15.95) offers quality writing in manageable doses, well-laced with laughter. You'll find her women fortifying. Whatever life dishes out, they take no prisoners.

Rebecca Hood-Adams received her Master's degree in English from Delta State University and her B.A. in journalism from Memphis State University. Ms. Hood-Adams has had several articles published including her collection of verse, Biscuit Soppin' Blues.

DELTA SCENE is looking for a few good writers.

Delta Scene Magazine is a quarterly publication sponsored by Delta State University whose sole purpose is to reflect the history, culture and interests of the people of the Delta region of Mississippi.

Delta Scene is constantly searching for untapped sources of talent and welcomes and encourages submissions

on pertinent subject matter, fictional or otherwise. Original poetry, photography and artwork are also welcomed.

If you are a writer and would like to submit material for editorial consideration, send your typewritten, double-spaced manuscript and a prepaid self-addressed return envelope to:

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